

PinkMonkey Literature Notes on . . .

Fahrenheit 451

by

Ray Bradbury
1953



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by TheBestNotes Staff

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The novel takes place in an unnamed futuristic city sometime in the 24th century. The atmosphere is fantastic, for technology has transformed society into a land of virtual reality and ultra-futurism. Television is totally interactive. Giant crematoriums collect and dispose of bodies in a monstrous, helicopter-borne contraption known as the Big Flue. Doors are programmed to announce visitors before they even arrive. Books are illegal, as is any true exercise of thought. Mankind has become lazy and stupid because of the excesses of technology. In fact, the people no longer know how to do simple things because some machine has been designed to do everything.

Although there are some familiar things in this society, like neighborhoods, cars, and trees, there are also many fictional creations, like the Mechanical Hound, a robot designed to track and kill violators of the law once it has been programmed with their scent. Houses are so fireproofed that firemen start fires rather than put them out. Houses have built-in alarms that ring when someone has a book in his possession, alerting the firemen to go there and begin the burning. There are so many suicide attempts that traveling orderlies are always on hand to pump stomachs or stitch self-inflicted wounds. In the craziness of this futuristic world, it is comforting to find that beds still have to be made and breakfast still has to be eaten. In short, Bradbury has created a world alien enough to be exotic and threatening, but familiar enough to seem real.

CHARACTER LIST

Major Characters

Guy Montag - a fireman in the 24th century who burns books and the homes of the people that own them. He begins to question his life when he meets an extraordinary and fresh young girl. His new sense of purpose propels him headlong into life-threatening danger.

Mildred "Millie" Montag - Montag's wife. She lives a vacuous life filled with television and radio. She has no ideas of her own and is frightened by the very notion of non-conformity. She ultimately betrays her husband to the authorities rather than face the meaninglessness of her own life.

Clarisse McClellan - Montag's seventeen-year old neighbor. She is a fresh young girl whose nonconformist attitudes make her an outcast. She likes to pick flowers and watch birds and her fresh old-fashioned values are cause enough for her to see a psychiatrist. She is the catalyst for Montag's change, causing him to question his own happiness. A hit-and-run driver kills her.

Captain Beatty - the chief fireman at the station. He has read many books and memorized most of them. He appears to be a hard-core believer in the new system and ultimately forces Montag to burn down his own house. Montag kills Beatty in this confrontation.

Professor Faber - an old English professor whose help Montag enlists when he decides to be a revolutionary.

Granger - an author and intellectual exile who is the leader of a group that hopes to re-populate the world with books.

Minor Characters

Mrs. Phelps and Mrs. Bowles - Montag's neighbors. He frightens them by showing them his stolen books in a fit of anger.

Unidentified Woman - a martyr who sets herself and her home on fire rather than let the firemen do it. Her death preys on Montag's growing self-awareness. Montag steals a book from her house before he leaves.

Stoneman and Black - two firemen who work along with Montag. They believe in the system and wish to religiously conform to the rules and regulations. Montag plants a book in Black's house.

Fred Clement, Dr. Simmons, Prof. West Reverend Padover - members of Granger's exiled group. They are all eminent scholars who are non-conformists and idealists.

CONFLICT

Protagonist - The protagonist in the novel is Guy Montag, a 24th century fireman who starts fires rather than puts them out. His responsibility to the city is to burn houses that contain books, since books are illegal. Montag begins to question his acceptance of the status quo and learns to be a non-conformist. Various people and events encourage him in his pursuit of truth, including Clarisse McClellan and the old lady who dies in her home. By the end of the novel, Montag is the leader of a revolutionary movement dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge.

Antagonist - The antagonist for Montag and for most of the people in the novel is their society, which is futuristic and dictatorial; thinking for oneself is censored and life has no meaning. It has been mandated that all men should be equally intelligent and informed; therefore, possessing books and seeking meaningful knowledge are criminal acts. Television and sleeping pills are the opiate escapes of nearly everyone. Captain Beatty and the other firemen are the foremost representatives of this oppressive social order. They burn the homes and belongings of all "criminals" who own or read books or defy the law in any other way. They create a Mechanical Hound, which is an emotionless, mechanical killing machine that can be programmed to seek out and destroy free thinkers, hunting them down by their scents; the hound is blind to anything but the destruction for which it is programmed. Of all the firemen, Beatty seems to be the harshest in his pursuit and punishment of criminals, particularly Montag. Perhaps it is because he has read and memorized many books in the past, but now refuses to accept them or act on his suppressed idealism.

Climax - The novel climaxes when Montag and the other firemen are called to burn a home they discover is Montag's. Millie, Montag's wife, has betrayed her husband and turned him in as a criminal. Montag confronts Beatty and decides he must be killed in order to save himself and humanity; it is the moment of climax for Montag, for there is now no turning back. Montag bravely fights the Mechanical Hound; although it cripples him, Montag manages to run away.

Outcome - Although the story is a tragedy, it ends with a small ray of hope. Although Montag is driven from society, he manages to escape to the country, where he meets other self-exiled intellectual leaders. All of these men dedicate themselves to the goal of reintroducing books into the society. While Montag is in hiding, war breaks out, and Montag's city is destroyed. At the end of the book, Montag and the other exiles walk toward the destroyed city with the goal of rebuilding it.

SHORT PLOT/CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

From all outward appearances, Guy Montag is content in his job as a fireman in the 24th century town in which he lives. He has learned to accept that his society is dictatorial, expressly forbidding its citizens from reading or possessing books or seeking any other intellectual self-improvement. Montag has even learned to take pleasure in the flames that shoot from his igniter when he is called to burn the dwelling of the citizens that possess books or commit other crimes against the society. He is successful in distancing himself from the fact that his purpose in life is to destroy other peoples' property.

The novel opens on a typical day for Montag, the protagonist of the novel; he finishes work and heads toward home. On the way, he runs into his teenage neighbor, Clarisse McClellan, who lives in the house next door to

him. In the futuristic world in which she lives, Clarisse is judged to be peculiar, for she is strangely old-fashioned. She is interested in the way flowers smell and how the grass feels under her feet. She is seeing a psychiatrist because of her non-conformist interests. As she talks to Montag, Clarisse challenges him by asking, "Are you happy?" This simple question is Montag's catalyst for change and causes everything that follows in the novel.

Without eagerness, Montag goes home to Millie, his wife. There is never any affection between them; in fact, they seldom even notice one another. On this particular night, as bombers fly overhead to foreshadow impending war, Montag discovers Millie has taken an overdose, which is a common occurrence in the town. He calmly calls the suicide orderlies, who are always standing by to come to the rescue of those who attempt to kill themselves. With little effort, they save Millie's life. The distance between Millie and Montag deepens the next day when he tries to talk to her about her actions. She claims not to remember what she has done and returns to her interactive television, totally ignoring him.

Over the next several weeks, Clarisse and Montag develop a friendly relationship. They talk about ideas and thoughts in a way that no one in this society seems to do anymore. Because of Clarisse's influence, Montag grows more concerned about his own life. Then one day, Clarisse disappears and Montag is troubled. Work troubles him even more, for he must participate in burning an old woman's home. Refusing to leave her books and her belongings, she lights her own fire and stays inside, dying a martyr. Montag is moved by the woman's bravery and sees it as a symbol of what is wrong with society. Almost in protest, he steals a book from the woman's house.

Back at home, Montag learns that Clarisse has been killed; her death upsets him greatly. He tries to talk to his wife about books and ideas and what is wrong with society, but she is not interested. The next day, Montag calls in sick to work, for he has lost all interest in his former life. His boss, Beatty, comes to his home and warns him that sometimes firemen go through phases when they steal books; he reminds Montag if they do not return the books within twenty-four hours, they will be arrested and all their belongings burned. Montag thinks he should get rid of the books he has stolen, including the one from the old woman's house.

After Beatty leaves, Montag shows the old woman's book to his wife; he also shows her some twenty others he has apparently stolen over the years. Millie is terrified and refuses to deal with the situation. In frustration, Montag takes one of his books and leaves to visit with Faber, an old English professor he once knew. The two of them devise a plan to save the knowledge from Montag's books. They decide that Montag must memorize the books to be ensured that their contents are preserved. When Montag goes home, he again frightens his wife by showing her his books; he also shows them to two neighbors. Then he goes to the fire station to turn over one of his books so no one will be suspicious of him. At the fire station, the alarm sounds and Montag must go with Beatty and the other firemen to destroy a house. When they arrive, he realizes it is his own home they are supposed to burn.

At his house, Montag discovers that his own wife has turned him in. In a rage, he kills Beatty and is then attacked by the Hound. He manages to escape and goes to see Faber, seeking help. Faber takes Montag to the country, where some other intellectual exiles are living. Montag becomes part of their group. Like the others, he struggled to memorize books. Their plan is to someday put the knowledge from the books back on paper.

While Montag is in exile, the long-awaited war finally breaks out. The city that Montag has come from is completely destroyed. After the fighting is over, Montag and the others walk back to the city. They are determined to build a new civilization there.

THEMES

There are several important and related themes that are developed throughout the novel. By describing the

damage caused by a lack of books or knowledge and by an over dependence on technology, Bradbury's purpose seems to be an attack on such conditions before they occur, hopefully to prevent them.

Major Theme - The major theme of the book is Bradbury's attack on censorship. In the futuristic society he portrays, the government has banned the reading or owning of all books and the accumulation of any knowledge. As a result, the citizens have become non-threatening, non-interesting humans who can be easily led and manipulated through fear. Even though the society that Bradbury depicts in the book is very extreme, there is a clear statement about the danger of any kind of intellectual censorship.

Minor Themes - Closely related to the theme of banning books is the theme of conformity. The government has disallowed the accumulation of any knowledge, from books or other sources, for it does not want any one person to be smarter than the other. If everyone is exactly alike, stripped of knowledge and interest, they will pose no threat to the dictatorial government in charge.

Bradbury also weaves in the theme of the corruption caused by excessive reliance on machines rather than humans. Since everything in this 24th century society is done through automation, humans have lost the ability to do even the simplest of tasks. Apathy and ignorance are the norm amongst the citizens and they pass their time watching boring television, programmed by the government, and taking pills to make them sleep and temporarily forget the miserable state of their existence. Some of the machines are described, and they are frightening. There is the Mechanical Hound that relentlessly pursues and mauls a criminal who dares to have a book in his house. There is also the Big Flue into which all bodies are placed after death.

MOOD

The tone of *Fahrenheit 451* is eerily futuristic and gloomy. The world, as it is portrayed in the novel, is a dictatorial police state, filled with strange technological modernizations that have deprived mankind of a purpose. Accumulation of knowledge and the possession of books are illegal. Mechanical Hounds are programmed to hunt down and kill "criminals", whose bodies are then quickly destroyed in helicopter crematoriums. Although Clarisse brings some brightness to the novel for the short time she is around, her death is yet another gloomy and frightening reminder of the cold and unpredictable world created by Bradbury. At the end of the novel, war has ravaged the city in which Montag lived. The only other bright spot occurs when he and the other exiles walk toward the destruction with the hope of rebuilding it with freedoms.

AUTHOR INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

Ray Bradbury was born in Waukegan, Illinois, on August 22, 1920. The third son of Leonard Spaulding Bradbury and Esthere Marie Moberg Bradbury, Ray showed promise as a writer at the early age of eleven when he began writing short stories on butcher paper. As a child, he was fascinated by magic and fantasy and spent many an afternoon dreaming that he would grow up to be a magician himself. In his youth, his family moved from Illinois to Arizona, and then on to Los Angeles, where he spent most of his earlier years.

Bradbury's first story, "Holler Bochen's Dilemma," was printed in 1938 in an amateur fan magazine. He went on to publish his own magazine, called *Futura Fantasia*. Then in 1941, he published a short story called "Pendulum," for which he received his first income. During the 1940's, he dedicated himself to writing short stories and developed his own distinct literary style. Most of his subject matter was fantastic, as seen in such stories as "Uncle Einar," a tale about a man with green wings. "The Big Black and White Game," published in 1945, earned Bradbury a name for himself as a short story writer. In 1947, he published a collection of his short stories entitled *Dark Carnival*.

In 1950, Bradbury turned his attention solely to science fiction, although most of his writing had an element of social commentary in it. *The Martian Chronicles* reflected the prevailing anxieties of post-war America and the fascination that mankind had developed for discovering life on other planets. The book was very popular and

gained Bradbury the reputation as a leading writer of science fiction in America.

Bradbury continued to write science fiction novels and is best known for *Fahrenheit 451*, *Dandelion Wine* and *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. Many of his books have been made into major motion pictures and several have won him awards, including the O’Henry Memorial Award, the Benjamin Franklin award, the Aviation Space Writers Association Award, and the Grand Master Award from the Science Fiction Writers of America. He was also awarded the World Fantasy Award for Lifetime Achievement.

Aside from his literary achievements, Bradbury served as the consultant for United States pavilion at the New York World’s Fair in 1964. In the early nineties, he contributed to the conception of the *Orbitron* space ride at Euro Disney, France. At the present, he continues to write and lecture on science fiction.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES / ANALYSIS

(Note: The novel is divided into three parts. There are no chapters within the parts. For the purpose of commentary, the parts will be divided into sections based on the major actions or events that occur. These sections are not noted in the novel, nor are they intended to suggest the novel should have been arranged so. Instead, the author of this guide has given suggested section headings within each part to facilitate better understanding of the major events taking place in that section. The section headings are given in Italics.)

PART 1: “THE HEARTH AND THE SALAMANDER”

Montag meets his neighbor Clarisse

Summary

The main character, Montag, is a fireman in the 24th century. His job is not to put out fires, but to start them in the homes of people who have defied the laws by owning and reading books. At the start of the novel, Montag finds it extremely pleasurable to watch the fires spouting forth from the nozzle of his hose and see the house in front of him being razed by flames. He feels proud to be doing the work of his dictatorial state.

After fighting the fire, Montag returns to the station, hangs up his helmet and walks out into the night towards his home. On the way, he feels strange, as if someone is “faintly breathing near him.” He turns the corner and runs into his new neighbor, Clarisse McClellan. She is a lovely young girl and Montag is enthralled by her presence. She walks the rest of the way with him and questions him about his job. She whimsically reminds him that firemen of old used to put out fires rather than start them. Her strange and unfamiliar way of talking about the laws makes Montag uneasy. He feels she is too free-spirited, questioning the society as it exists. In contrast to Clarisse’s easy pleasantness, Montag is jaded and accepting of the status quo of things.

When they reach Clarisse’s house, which is next door to Montag’s, he bids her a warm good-bye. Clarisse runs toward her door, but comes back after a moment. She asks Montag, “Are you happy?” Without waiting for his answer, she disappears into her house.

Notes

From the opening of the novel, the setting and tone are established as eerily futuristic. Firemen no longer are needed to put out fires, for all the homes are sheeted with inflammable materials; as a result, there is never an opportunity to put out the fire in a burning building, to rescue possessions, or to save lives. Instead, the job of firemen is now to set fire to the homes of “criminals” who have dared to defy the government and possess books. Montag, the protagonist of the novel, is a fireman. At the beginning of the book, he relishes his job of destruction, grinning wildly as flames consume the home of a criminal. He feels honored to be part of a team of men who insure that there are no books in existence. The government does not allow them, for it does not want individuals to think on their own or become wiser than the next citizen. Bradbury’s main theme in the novel becomes immediately apparent. The entire story will be about the destructive force of censorship, even though the practice is never called by its name.

Montag is one of multitude of firemen who are responsible for property destruction; in the book, he becomes a sort of everyman who unthinkingly does his duty and has even learned to find macabre pleasure in his powers of destruction. He has worked at his same job for ten years, never questioning the evil of what he does. Significantly, his helmet is number 451; this number assumes symbolic importance in the novel since it is also the temperature at which most paper burns.

Montag's life is changed by his new next-door neighbor, a seventeen-year old girl named Clarisse McClellan. One night on the way home from work, he chances to run into her and they walk on together. He is amazed at her free spirit and her questioning of governmental authority. Clarisse has no qualms about expressing her opinions, even when they are radical and revolutionary. She talks about the feel of the green grass underfoot and the smell of the pink flowers, things that Montag has never noticed. It is obvious to him that she is a free thinker and an individual. From their first encounter, she fully challenges Montag. She asks him the simple question, "Are you happy?" These three words set off a volley of doubts and queries in Montag's mind.

In the past, Montag has always been content with his job and his life; but Clarisse's question makes him realize that he has never been happy like she seems to be. As a result, this young teenager becomes the catalyst for Montag's self-realization. From this point forward in the novel, he will question his purpose and involvement in life.

Montag's wife overdoses on sleeping pills

Summary

Montag enters his house with Clarisse's question hanging in the air about him; he simply cannot get it off his mind or stop thinking about the answer. He realizes with a sense of growing defeat that he indeed is not happy. To add to his misery, he hears the warplanes overhead and thinks about the political situation; war seems inevitable and imminent.

Before entering the bedroom, Montag imagines Mildred, his wife, lying on the bed like a cold statue with thimble-sized radios clamped on her ears. Every night, she listens to music and falls into a deep sleep. Once inside the room, he sees that Mildred is already asleep with the aid of her sleeping pills and her music. Montag thinks about how distant he and she are from one another. As he turns toward his own bed, he nearly trips on an object in the floor. Using his igniter, he sees that it is an empty crystal bottle that had earlier held sleeping tablets. It is obvious that Millie has overdosed. Montag feels for the telephone and calls the emergency hospital. At once, orderlies come to his house with stomach pumps; they clean out her stomach and transfuse fresh blood into her bloodstream.

Montag sits beside his wife, watching the new blood take effect. He suddenly hears laughter from Clarisse's house and goes outside to eavesdrop. He hears a voice, probably that of her uncle; he is talking about the past when men used one another without any qualms. Montag returns home and tries to sleep; but his mind is buzzing with thoughts of Mildred, Clarisse, her uncle, the sleeping tablets, and fire. He finally takes a sleeping tablet himself and slides into a deep slumber.

Notes

This section has Montag coming face to face with his own empty world. First Clarisse upsets him with her fresh opinions, unconventional thoughts, and probing question, all of which make him face his own dull conventionality and dissatisfaction. Entering his dark home, he sees his distant wife, who is in a deep sleep, thanks to her sleeping pills. When he realizes that she has overdosed, he feels himself being torn apart. Adding to his misery is the awful sound of two jet bombers flying overhead, reminding him that war is imminent.

Montag calls the emergency hospital for help. Emergency technicians quickly invade his house to save Mildred; they show no courtesy or concern, but immediately go to work. It is a frightening scene; the machines that

pump Mildred's stomach are enormous. One with a huge tube looks like a "black cobra;" as it crawls inside Mildred, its "eye" seems capable of gazing into her soul. After reviving their patient, the two orderlies deliver the terrifying news that overdoses are very common in this futuristic society; they are always on call to handle such situations. The sense of foreboding in the scene is overwhelming.

Montag and Clarisse meet again

Summary

In the morning, Montag finds his wife's bed empty and rushes to the kitchen door. He finds Mildred having her breakfast with her ears plugged in to music. She does not remember the previous night's events and only claims to be terribly hungry. He tells her of the ordeal, but she refuses to talk about it.

Montag goes outside, where he meets Clarisse. She has a dandelion flower in her hand that she rubs under his chin. She tells him that if the flower leaves yellow powder, it means he is in love. When nothing is left under Montag's chin, he feels angry and defiant. Clarisse thinks that Montag is different from other men, for he does not laugh at her. She thinks it is strange that he is a fireman. She asks Montag why and how he chose his profession.

Clarisse must leave. She has an appointment with her psychiatrist. After she is gone, Montag feels uneasy again.

Notes

When Montag wakes and finds that his wife is not in bed, he is frightened. He finds her calmly having breakfast and listening to the radio. She cannot recall the previous night and refuses to listen to her husband's explanation. As always, she is eager to watch her television; she believes that characters on the screen are more human than anyone else, including her husband. The void between the two of them seems enormous.

In this scene, Bradbury is careful to point out the futuristic technology that seems to deprive humans of a purpose. For example, the toaster in Montag's house pops up the toast and places it on the plate. The wall-to-wall television is interactive, so that the viewer can become part of the show. Mildred spends her life in front of the television; in fact, she has three walls of her parlor covered by giant screens. Like most of society, she has no purpose and is content to be entertained.

Clarisse stands out as a strong contrast to Mildred. She seems lively and unconventional in this dull, futuristic society, for she believes in old time values and traditions. She loves to watch the rain and taste it on her lips. She takes time to notice the flowers, to watch birds, and to collect butterflies; she also spends time dreaming of fanciful things. She even dares to hold on to old-fashioned superstitions, like the one about powder from the dandelion. In this warped and twisted society in which she lives, Clarisse is regarded as unstable because of her keen interest in the small things. She sees a psychiatrist since she has been told her behavior is impractical and extraordinary. The world Bradbury has created is based on conformity and Clarisse, with her dreamy idealism, refuses to conform.

The Mechanical Hound

Summary

The Fire Station is also the home of the Mechanical Hound, a contraption that is used to catch and destroy "criminals." It is a powerful beast that is programmed to find a particular human scent. When the hound finds its victim, a four-inch hollow steel needle plunges down from its proboscis and injects jolts of morphine or procaine into the criminal. Its victim is then tossed into the incinerator.

Whenever Montag gets close to the Mechanical Hound, it growls and behaves as if it is going to catch him. Montag tells Captain Beatty, the boss, that he is afraid of the hound, but the captain laughs at him. He insists that the hound is just a fine bit of craftsmanship and technology. He then questions Montag as to whether he has

a guilty conscience about something.

Notes

The Mechanical Hound is a horrible example of the progress made in the name of science. It is made of brass, copper, steel, and “bits of ruby glass and sensitive capillary hairs.” It is used to track down and destroy “criminals;” their scents are programmed into its memory. Once it finds its victim, the hound captures the criminal and throws him in the incinerator. Man no longer has to become involved in police work.

Montag is frightened of the hound. He is certain that the beast does not like him, for it growls whenever he comes near. Captain Beatty hints that Montag feels guilty about something, and the hound senses that. No further explanation is given, but the hint of something hidden in Montag’s life builds suspense. There is also some mention made of something “hidden” behind the ventilator grill, but it is not explained either; however, this “planting” further builds curiosity and suspense in the novel. Bradbury seems to be indicating that danger lurks in anything hidden. The foreboding presence of the emotionless hound and its growling at Montag intensifies the feeling of suspense

Clarisse disappears and the old lady burns to death with her books

Summary

Montag has grown accustomed to seeing Clarisse in her yard, shaking walnut trees or knitting sweaters. He often goes over to visit with her, and they spend a great deal of time talking. Montag finds he has become quite comfortable in her presence. Clarisse tells Montag that some people find her antisocial, but she tries to be kind and sociable even though people are so different now. She regrets that so many people hurt each other, even shooting and killing one another. Montag finds that he looks forward to the time he spends in conversation with Clarisse. Then one day, she simply disappears without a word or a trace. Montag tries to find her, but to no avail.

One day while Montag is playing cards with his firemen friends, he notices how similar all their faces are. He finds himself staring at them, searching for some differences. Suddenly the alarm sounds, and everyone leaps forward to do his duty. Their destination is the three-story home of an old woman whose has refused to turn in her books. The old woman watches in shock as the firemen surround her home. They then enter the house, throw the books into a pile, and douse them with kerosene. In the process, Montag’s hand seems to automatically close over a book, which he slips under his shirt.

The old woman absolutely refuses to leave her house; she bravely lights a single match and tosses it on the kerosene books. Suddenly her whole home is in flames. She dies a martyr to her cause. Montag is shaken by her actions.

Notes

His friendship with Clarisse has had an enormous effect on Montag. Her words always seem to spark off a new trend of thought in his mind. He finds himself questioning his choices and his motivations. Her sudden disappearance upsets his entire being. He is further distraught when he cannot locate her.

The change in Montag’s personality manifests itself in a questioning attitude at work. Captain Beatty and the other firemen are even forced to remind him of the proper functioning of his job. The Mechanical Hound’s obvious dislike for him seems to coincide with the birth of his conscious thought and self-reflection, which are two things the Hound has been programmed to destroy. It is significant that the Captain questions Montag about whether he owns any books or whether he has a guilty conscience.

When the alarm rings, all the firemen leap up to do their duties, except Montag. He moves more slowly, for he now views his job as insane and troubling. When they arrive at the home of an old woman, the firemen find her

books and place them in a pile to burn. Somehow, almost unconsciously, Montag finds himself taking one of her books and hiding it under his shirt. The old woman refuses to leave and quotes a famous line from another martyr about the light given off by the fires of free thought. She then sets her books on fire; as her home burns, she perishes. The martyrdom of the old woman has a profound impact on Montag. He is never able to forget the moment.

Montag returns home with the stolen book and finds out Clarisse has been killed

Summary

On the trip back to the station, Beatty tells Montag that the old woman's quote came from Nicholas Ridley in the sixteenth century. He and Hugh Latimer were burned at the stake as heretics.

Returning home, Montag hides the book under his pillow. He feels the distance between him and his wife very acutely. On an impulse, Montag asks Mildred whether she remembers where they had first met; she cannot recall the place or the circumstances. Montag then asks Mildred if she has heard anything about Clarisse. She responds that the girl was run over and killed by a car four days ago. Her family has since moved away.

Shocked at the news, Montag goes outside, where he senses something moving around. He notices a shadow with greenish luminescent smoke around it; he thinks it may be the Mechanical Hound.

Notes

This section further builds the tension of the plot. Beatty is again portrayed as a fearful character. The fact that he knows who originally spoke the old woman's quote reveals that he is a well-read man. It is very disturbing that he has experienced the enlightening power of books and has still dedicated himself to the destruction of them. Additionally, his repeated inferences and questioning looks arouse both Montag's fear and the reader's suspicion that something bad is going to happen.

There are several other elements of suspense in this section. Montag begins to feel that he is out of control, changing more than he would like to do. The theft of the old woman's book was like a compulsion that he had no power to stop; it was as if his hand acted on its own. But once the book was under his shirt, he knew he would keep it. He takes it home and hides it under his pillow. The impact of his actions will be shown later in the novel.

With his changed attitude, Montag feels more than ever before the distance between Mildred and himself, and it pains him. Millie, as always, does not seem bothered by anything. She has not noticed any changes in her husband, nor is she upset by the fact that neither of them can recollect the place where they had first met. When she tells Montag what has happened to Clarisse, he is totally shocked and immensely disturbed over her death. He is also upset that his wife had forgotten to tell him of the accident that had occurred four days ago. Mildred's indifference towards Montag and Clarisse is painful.

More than ever, Montag needs to feel a closeness to Mildred. He tries to talk to her about his job and then about books. She thinks she is too small-minded to understand Montag's big ideas. She is fearful that he seems to be thinking in an independent way and tells him to quit talking about such things. She then asks to be left alone. Montag goes outside where he feels the presence of something unnamed. He thinks it may be the Mechanical Hound. The mere suggestion of the beast underscores the subtle and dangerous changes in Montag; it is clear that he now has something real to fear. Montag is thinking and harboring books, two actions that are in clear defiance of the law of the land; the closer Montag gets to knowledge, the more danger he is in.

Montag stays home from work and Beatty comes to see him at home

Summary

Montag gets up in the morning and decides he does not want to go to work; as a result, he calls in sick. Montag

tells Mildred he is thinking about quitting his job, but she does not even respond. Captain Beatty soon shows up on the pretense of checking on how Montag is feeling. In truth, it seems he has learned that Montag possesses at least one book. In a veiled conversation in which he never directly confronts Montag, Beatty reminds him that books are not only illegal, they are also a waste of time. He then tells

Montag that many firemen, at one time or another, steal books; however, he states that it is a phase they quickly outgrow.

Beatty then recalls the time when people read entire books. As time passed, all the books were condensed into short digests. Books slowly disappeared, and all anyone read were comic books and sex magazines. Before long, books had entirely vanished. Beatty claims that the government did not make any formal declaration of censorship; rather, advanced technology simply made books useless. Then it was unanimously decided that men should all be alike and equal in intelligence. Since books were “loaded guns” that could give a person extra knowledge, they were all destroyed. Firemen then became the protectors of the new laws; they were ordered to burn any books that were found and to destroy the home of the criminal that possessed them.

Beatty also talks about the changes in education. The time in school was shortened, and the study of languages and philosophies was dropped. The government felt that people only needed to learn how to press buttons, push switches, and pull levers. Reading was considered to be a distraction that merely got in the way. While Beatty is speaking, Mildred begins to straighten her husband’s bed. Montag fearfully remembers the book he took from the old lady’s home and hid under his pillow. He stops Mildred from finishing the bed.

Beatty goes on talking. He suggests that Clarisse was killed and her family was forced to move away because she had begun to think too much and to question too many things. Montag is horrified at the explanation. Before he leaves, Beatty makes a final remark. He mentions that once in a while, a fireman starts wondering about what lies inside the books he burns; but Beatty emphasizes that nothing of value is found in any book. Montag bravely asks what happens to a fireman who takes a book home. Beatty, unfazed, answers that the fireman is given twenty-four hours to burn the book. If he does not burn it, the firemen will come to his home and do their duty. After this explanation, Beatty finally leaves.

Notes

This important section of the novel gives much explanation. It begins by again presenting the indifference that exists between Montag and Mildred. When he decides to call into work, saying he is sick, she is not worried about her husband’s health and even refuses to get him his medicine. When he speaks about quitting his job, she seems oblivious to his discontent. When he shares his recent independent thoughts with her, she is terrified.

Captain Beatty’s arrival, though supposedly unexpected, seems planned. It is obvious that he is suspicious of Montag. In order to make him uncomfortable, Beatty gives an elaborate explanation on books and how they became censored. He also explains the changes in education. He ends his lecture by explaining how some firemen become curious about the books that they burn; some even steal some of the books. Montag is brave enough to ask what happens to a fireman who takes a book. Beatty explains he has twenty-four hours to burn the book, or the firemen will come to his house to do their duty.

It is ironic that while Beatty drones on about books and their uselessness, Mildred begins to straighten her husband’s bed. Montag is terrified, for he remembers the book that he has taken from the old woman’s house and hidden under his pillow. Before he is exposed, he manages to stop his wife; but there is a marvelous moment of suspense carefully created by Bradbury.

Montag is at a crucial juncture in his intellectual development. He can save his book, continue to think independently, and run the risk of facing serious consequences; his other option is to surrender his intellectual

hunger and nullify the influence of Clarisse McClellan. As Montag ponders what he should do, Bradbury again builds suspense.

Montag tells Millie about the book

Summary

After Beatty's departure, Mildred urges Montag to return to work. For the first time, she seems a bit troubled by his peculiar behavior of late. Montag, however, has no heart for the job anymore. He confesses to Mildred that he has stolen books, not just one, but twenty or so. He shows her where he has been hiding them in the grill of the air-conditioning system. Millie is terrified and moves to throw the books into the incinerator. Montag stops her by telling her that they are both in trouble together. He then tries to make her understand that his career is wrong and that he needs to do the right thing for a change. Suddenly, the mechanical voice at the front door announces that someone is coming. Montag decides he will not open the door; instead, he opens a book at random and begins reading. He later turns off the door alarm so he and Millie will not be further disturbed.

Notes

This is a scene of revelation that is really a turning point in the novel, for Montag tells his deepest secret to his wife. He reveals that he has stolen around twenty books, which he hides behind the air conditioning grill. Even the dull Millie understands the seriousness of her husband's offense and immediately moves to burn his books. He, however, is able to stop her. He also tries to explain to her how his job is wrong, but his thinking is right; Millie cannot understand his explanation. The suspense that Bradbury has created in the novel about the unknown is now replaced with suspense about the consequences of Montag's actions.

Like all the citizens in this futuristic society, Mildred has been made lazy by and dependent upon the technological advancements that surround her. She can no longer think for herself, just as the government has planned. It is not surprising that she is terrified of punishment and frightened by the prospect of secret knowledge. She accepts the rule that no one should have an individual thought; she certainly never has one herself. Instead, she totally believes in the government as it exists and is terrified of questioning or contradicting it. Ironically, Montag succeeds in keeping her from burning the books by telling her that the two of them are already in this together. Mildred believes him and seems to have no choice but to become his accomplice.

An interesting aspect of Montag's personality is also revealed in this scene. At the old woman's house, Montag was seen unconsciously taking a book; his hand seemed to act of its own accord. Now it is revealed that Montag has stolen many other books; his subconscious has been guiding him toward the self-discovery that Clarisse put in motion. Bradbury seems to be indicating that mankind has an inherent desire to improve his station in life by seeking the truth. Montag's unconscious quest for knowledge is proof of this theme.

At this point, it is important to note the title of Part I, "The Hearth and the Salamander." The hearth obviously refers to the place where a fire is burned; additionally, it is usually a reference to the place where a man's heart is – his hearth and home. The salamander refers to the myth that the creature can live through fire; it is, therefore, a positive image that suggests that this society can live through the fire it is undergoing. Since *Fahrenheit 451* has as its primary image the destruction of books (and knowledge) through burning, the title further suggests that thought and knowledge, like the salamander, will make it through the fire.

PART 2: "THE SIEVE AND THE SAND"

Montag and Millie read; Montag calls an old English professor

Summary

For the rest of the afternoon, Montag and Millie read through the hidden collection of books. At one point, they hear a faint scratching outside their door. When Mildred hears a sniff, she remarks in relief that it is only a dog. Montag, even though he is too scared to look, knows it is the Mechanical Hound.

The tension of the mood is further heightened by the sound of the bombers circling overhead. With their roar in the background, Mildred wonders out loud what will happen to them when Beatty discovers their deceit. Montag tries to convince her not to worry so much. He also tells her that books hold the key to a better life. Millie becomes hysterical, screaming that Montag is going to ruin them both. Montag is saved from her further hysteria by the ringing of the phone. She calms herself down to talk to her friends about their make-believe television world. As she chatters on the phone, Montag thinks about how worthless she is and about how she will never improve her life.

Montag shuts his eyes and remembers a day long ago when he met an old man named Faber, a retired English teacher. When Montag approached him, Faber had quickly hidden something under his coat; Montag believes it was a book. Montag did not question him, but sat beside Faber and talked to him. Faber had even recited a few lines from a poem for Montag. After an hour of conversation, the old professor had written his address on a slip of paper and handed it to Montag. Montag now goes through his wallet and finds Faber's name and address. He calls him up and openly asks him how many copies of the Bible, Shakespeare, and Plato are left in the world. Faber answers that there are none remaining and hangs up the phone.

Montag realizes the thing for him to do is to turn one of the books over to Beatty to clear up any suspicions. He will make a copy of the book before handing it over. He hides the chosen book in his jacket and leaves the house.

Notes

This scene is again filled with tension. As Montag reads through some of the books, a scratching is heard outside the door. Mildred is convinced that it is only a dog, but Montag is sure that it is the Mechanical Hound. As he reads, he tries not to think about his danger. Instead, he thinks about Clarisse as he reads about friendship. "We cannot tell the precise moment when friendship is formed. As in filling a vessel drop by drop, there is at last a drop which makes it run over; so in a series of kindness there is at last one which makes the heart run over." Montag realizes that Clarisse made his vessel run over; she made a remarkable impact on him in the short time he knew her.

Montag wishes that he now had someone with whom to share his knowledge. Even though he reads to Millie, she is totally uninterested in the words. Her whole being is fearful about Montag and her getting caught; she grows hysterical over the thought, accusing her husband of ruining them. Only the ringing of the phone calms her down. As his wife chatters to her friends, Montag thinks of the past. He remembers Faber, an old English professor. When he was a fireman, Montag had often thought of investigating him, for he was certain the professor still had books. One time when Montag had approached him, he had quickly hidden a book under his shirt. It is interesting to note that Montag, even back then, did not report the old man for hiding the book.

Montag is now drawn to Faber, wanting to talk to him again and share knowledge. When he finds Faber's address and phone number in his wallet, he telephones. He asks Faber how many copies of the Bible, Shakespeare, and Plato still exist in the world. Faber sadly answers that there are none and sadly hangs up. Montag is excited over the thought that he may truly own the last copy of the Bible. He is determined to preserve the ideas printed there, even if he cannot save the book itself. He decides he will copy the book before he turns it over to Beatty, trying to avoid suspicion. It is obvious that Montag is a changed man. He now has a purpose in life; he has also lost his fear of the system and stands unafraid, facing the world.

Montag has a memory of his childhood

Summary

Montag is traveling on the subway to go and see Faber. He has a flashback to his childhood; a cousin had offered him a dime if he could fill a sieve with sand. He tried and tried, not realizing it was impossible, until finally the tears flowed down his cheeks. Montag also thinks about his efforts at memorizing the Bible so if it is

burned its contents will not be forgotten. The problem is that as much as he tries, he is unable to retain any of it. He tries to think about what he has studied in the Bible, but can recall nothing. The train radio and the people on the train seem to make it impossible for him to concentrate. His endeavor at memorization reminds him of filling the sieve with sand.

Notes

It is appropriate that Montag has a flashback to the sieve and the sand; its symbolism is self-explanatory, and its relevance is obvious. Montag is trying to memorize as much as possible from his books, especially from the Bible, but everything he reads seems to slip away from him. "The words fell through, and he thought, in a few hours, there will be Beatty, and here will be one handing this over, so no phrase must escape me, each line must be memorized." His failure at memorization frustrates him to the point of tears, just as when he was as a child trying to fill up the sieve with sand.

Montag and Faber come up with a plan

Summary

Montag reaches Faber's house. The professor is at first unwilling to let him in; however, when he sees Montag's book, he cannot resist and opens the door. The sight of the Bible moves Faber; it has been years since he has seen a copy of it. Montag tells Faber about his feelings of unease and his growing discontent. He asks the older man to teach him about books. In the beginning, Faber thinks it is a very bad idea; the risk is not worth the cost to either of them. But he, like Montag, is enticed by ideas. The prospect of having someone to discuss ideas with is overwhelmingly appealing.

Montag and Faber come up with a plan to repopulate the world with books. They will plant books in the homes of the firemen themselves. Eventually, all the firemen and all the firehouses will be burned. Faber is reluctant to the plan, thinking it is unfeasible. Montag gains his support by tearing pages out of the Bible; to prevent any further destruction, Faber agrees.

Montag notices machinery and tools in Faber's house. The professor reveals that he is an inventor. He shows Montag one of his inventions, a small green bullet to be worn in the ear. With it, Faber can listen and talk to Montag from any place and at any time. Since Faber believes in the concept that people can learn even while they sleep, he will continuously whisper passages from books to Montag through the listening device. Faber also tells Montag that the device will enable him to help Montag deal with Beatty when the time comes.

Notes

Faber at first resists Montag, not even wanting to let him in his home; however, when he sees Montag's Bible, he is too excited to refuse him entry. It is the first copy of the Bible that old man has seen in a very long time. When Montag wants to talk about books with the old professor, he again resists; but he finally consents, for he knows it will be very pleasurable to discuss ideas again, despite the risk.

Bradbury then uses Faber as a mouthpiece for his own ideas. Faber explains how books make people uncomfortable, for they force them to constantly think and re-evaluate themselves. He adds that books alone are not the answer; people must also have the "right to carry out the actions" they learn in books. His idealism makes Montag realize that books must be reintroduced as a first step towards changing the face of society. He comes up with a plan to bring about the needed changes. He and Faber can plant books in all the firehouses and in all the homes of the firemen. Then all the firemen and the firehouses must be destroyed, leaving no means for future book burnings to be carried out. Once again, Faber resists Montag; in the end, however, he agrees to help his new friend in carrying out his plan. He even gives Montag one of his inventions, a listening device that can be hidden in the ear. It will allow Faber to recite passages of books to Montag at any place and at any time, even when he is sleeping.

Montag shows his books to the neighbors

Summary

After withdrawing money from the bank to fund the reproduction of his books, Montag returns home with Faber's green listening device in his ear. Mrs. Phelps and Mrs. Bowles, Millie's friends and insipid neighbors, soon come to visit. With frustration, Montag turns off the television and tries to engage the women in various intellectual conversations about children and politics. The women are ignorant and uninterested, which irritates Montag. In a fit of anger, he pulls out a book and shows it to the women; it is a foolish mistake.

Through his ear device, Faber urges Montag to stop, reminding him of how dangerous it is to show a book to anyone. Millie is panicked over her husband's action, but she manages to save the day. She tells the ladies that once each year the firemen are allowed to bring a book home to show its uselessness to his family members. Montag, having come to his senses, agrees with his wife's explanation. Millie persuades him to read a poem to show the ladies how silly it is. Montag renders the poem beautifully and emotionally; Mrs. Phelps is brought to tears. After the poem is read, Montag drops the book into the incinerator with a flourish.

As the women prepare to leave, Montag challenges them to go home and think about their past, their husbands, and their lifeless present. He then leaves the house, heading for the fire station. On the way to work, he listens to Faber's quiet voice explaining to him the stupidity and idiocy of people who have been blinded and muted by the system. At the fire station, Montag notices that the Hound is missing, which makes him feel uneasy. He immediately goes in to Beatty and returns one of his stolen books, hoping to end the suspicions about him. Montag then plays cards with the other firemen. Suddenly the alarm bell rings. The firemen leave the station and head for the home of the "criminal." Upon arriving, Montag realizes with horror that they are at his house.

Notes

In this scene, Montag breaks in frustration and shows one of his books to Mildred's vapid friends; it is a momentary lapse in control that could ruin both him and Millie. Fortunately, due to Faber's calming words of advice in his ear and Millie's quick thinking, the women are convinced that Montag has been allowed to bring the book home from the fire station. To further convince them of the lie, Montag reads the ladies a poem out of the book and then proceeds to toss it in the incinerator; the women seem to believe the story.

The poem that Montag reads is "Dover Beach" by Matthew Arnold. Even the foolish and empty-headed neighbors are affected by Montag's emotional reading; Mrs. Phelps is brought to tears, while Mrs. Bowles grows furious. Bradbury is clearly showing the power of poetry to transform even the most shallow of lives. After the ladies leave, Montag realizes the potential catastrophe he has nearly caused; he decides he must cover his tracks. He hides some of his books outside and selects one to take to the station and turn in to Beatty. With Faber reassuring him the whole time through the ear device, Montag begins to execute his damage control.

When Montag gets to the station, suspense once again builds. The absence of the Mechanical Hound is frightening and ominous. In addition, Beatty's cool response to Montag indicates that he is not fooled by the return of one book. Montag, however, manages to stay calm with the help of Faber's quiet and calm reassurances on the earphone. When the alarm bell rings, Beatty is unnaturally calm and unhurried. He glances at the address of the criminal and shoves it in his pocket. When the fireman arrive at the house they are to burn, Montag realizes it is his own. Part Two closes with this shocking turn of events.

PART 3: "BURNING BRIGHT"

Beatty is killed and the Mechanical Hound bites Montag

Summary

Montag is not overly surprised that Mrs. Black, one of the neighbor women, reported his possession of a book. He is shocked, however, when he finds out that his wife, Mildred, also turned him in. He watches her run out of the house with a suitcase and disappear in her "beetle" without even acknowledging him. Beatty, for his part, seems to be satisfied that Montag is caught. He tells him he has known for a long time about the books and that

he tried to warn Montag by sending the Hound on his trail. Beatty is most angry with Montag for not giving up, for not having been scared of the Hound and for having the audacity to persist in his quest for knowledge. Beatty uses many images and quotes from literature in his condemnation of Montag; after thoroughly berated him, Beatty then forces Montag to torch his own house. Contrary to Beatty's expectation, Montag takes pleasure in torching his home; he especially delights in ruining Millie's television room, which had consumed his wife's soul.

Faber whispers to Montag that he should run; but Montag cannot move. He is afraid of the Hound, for he knows his chance of escaping is dim. Beatty then discovers the green bullet in Montag's ear and says he will be able to trace the two-way radio to its source. Montag realizes he must kill Beatty. He turns the flame-thrower at his boss, burning him to death. Montag tries to run, but the Hound catches up with him. Montag puts up a noble fight, but the Hound injects its poison into his leg. Montag burns his leg, hoping to destroy the poison and hobbles away.

Notes

Beatty's smugness reveals that the man takes pleasure in the undoing of Montag. He reveals that he has known about the books for awhile and claims that he tried to warn Montag with the Mechanical Hound. Beatty is incensed that the fireman refused to heed the warnings and continued to try and acquire knowledge. As he lectures Montag, he quotes from books; it is obvious that Beatty has memorized passage after passage, and yet he is willing to destroy all books and the people who study them. He is obviously a conflicted man, one almost worth of sympathy.

Beatty makes Montag torch his own home, thinking it to be a huge punishment. Ironically, Montag takes pleasure in seeing it burn, especially the television room in which his wife spent her life. Once again, Montag manages to stay calm due to the encouragement of Faber. When his friend quietly encourages him to run over the listening device, Montag cannot heed his warning; he is too afraid of the Mechanical Hound. Then Beatty discovers the green "bullet" in Montag's ear and says he will trace its source.

Montag, frantic for his friend's safety and his own survival, decides he must kill Beatty; he turns the igniter on him, killing him in a most appropriate manner. It is the moment of climax in the plot, for Montag has taken a stance from which he can never turn back.

Once Beatty is dead, Montag rediscovers his own energy, which he uses to fight the Hound. Although it is a formidable, perhaps invulnerable, machine, Montag's rage is so great and his cause so worthy that he is able to fight the Hound off for awhile. Finally, it succeeds in injecting its poison into Montag's leg. Though he loses the use of his leg and probably the leg itself, Montag manages to hobble away. Although the entire scene is a tragic one, with the flight of Mildred, the destruction of Montag's house, the murder of Beatty, and the injection of the poison, it ends on a positive note. Miraculously, Montag manages to escape from the Hound and hobble away to freedom.

Montag is a fugitive from the law

Summary

Before departing, Montag retrieves some books that Millie had not found. When he hears someone approach, he tries to run; it is nearly impossible because of his crippled leg. Somehow he manages to escape. As he flees, he thinks of Beatty, recalling his face when he realized what Montag was doing to him. It strikes him as strange that Beatty simply stood there, never attempting to run. Montag realizes that Beatty, like him, had never been happy. Beatty, however, was not as courageous as Montag and felt powerless to defy the law. In reality, Beatty wanted to die; the realization stuns Montag.

Montag stops at the home of Mrs. Black. In revenge for her turning him in, he plants a few books in her kitchen.

He then goes outside and turns on the alarm.

Notes

Montag realizes that Beatty is another victim of the strange world they live in. Montag recalls a story about a fireman in Seattle who set the Mechanical Hound to his own scent and let it loose. He next remembers the orderlies who are kept so busy rescuing people from suicide. Beatty's willing acceptance of his own death seems to be another act of willful self-destruction that strikes Montag as evidence of how miserable mankind has become.

Montag, now a fugitive, knows from the radio that he is being hunted. As he tries to flee, he can hardly bear the pain in his crippled leg and his rising delirium; he is in a total panic, bordering on hysteria. He gains enough control to stop at the home of Mrs. Black, the neighbor woman who turned him in. Montag plants books in her kitchen and then turns on the alarm. He hopes that the new burning will detract attention from him. More importantly, Montag has taken the initial step of implementing his plan. Besides getting his revenge on Mrs. Black, he will be destroying the first fireman, for her husband works at the fire station. Montag feels doubly justified in his deed.

Montag and Faber plan an escape

Summary

When Montag finally reaches Faber's house, he is horrified and scared. In contrast, Faber is calm and unafraid; he is resolved to the fact that their rebellion is now inevitable. Faber tells Montag about some intellectual groups that are living in exile; Montag can certainly find refuge with one of these groups. Faber is going to meet with a friend who has a printing press. The books will be reproduced, and ideas will live on.

On television, it is announced that a new Mechanical Hound has been set up to hunt for Montag. To try and throw the Hound off, Montag burns everything he is wearing, and Faber sprays the house with a different scent. Montag then runs toward the river, carrying only a suitcase filled with Faber's dirty clothes and a bottle of alcohol. As he travels, he listens to the warnings on the radio. All the people have been told to open their doors and look for the fugitive.

As he nears the river, Montag senses that the Hound is in pursuit of him. When he reaches the water, he strips off his clothes and covers himself with alcohol to disguise his scent. The river sweeps him away into the dark of night.

Notes

Montag manages to reach the home of Faber, who is calm in contrast to his friend. He tells Montag about some exiled intellectuals and sends him on his way there. Faber then sets off to see a friend with a printing press in order to reproduce the remaining books. Faber believes that the rebellion begun by Montag must go forward.

The hi-tech advancement in science is again depicted. The Mechanical Hound has been reconstructed, complete with tuning and setting, and is already on Montag's trail. The radio broadcasts constant warnings for the people to be on the lookout for the fugitive. Montag struggles onward in his race to the river. Bradbury builds great suspense, making the final scene of the book tense and terrifying. Montag's crippled escape is timed to literary perfection. Just as capture seems inevitable, the protagonist reaches the river, loses his scent, and disappears into the night.

Montag escapes to safety but is "murdered" on television

Summary

The Hound and the helicopters are unable to locate Montag now that he is in the water. Unwilling to admit its own failure, the government comes up with a hoax. When a man is killed, it is announced, complete with

pictures, that Montag has been captured and executed. In truth, Montag is floating downstream and thinking about his childhood.

Montag comes ashore at the edge of a forest. He walks along a railroad track until he comes across a group of people around a fire. They are watching the “capture” of Montag on television. They welcome him into their midst and introduce themselves; it is obvious that they are exiled intellectuals. The leader, a man called Granger, says he was once an author; the others are all scholars or well-educated men. Montag feels inferior, but they welcome him as an equal and offer him protection. Montag is given a potion that will change his chemical composition; therefore, the Hound will never be able to find Montag by his scent.

The exiles tell Montag about their plan; each of them is memorizing a book before burning it. By committing the book to memory, it can live on. They believe that in the future, sometime after the imminent war, their oral tradition will once again find its way back onto paper and books will be printed again. In the meantime, they must study and learn their assigned texts. Montag’s assignment is to memorize the Biblical book of *Ecclesiastes*.

Notes

Through good planning and sheer determination, Montag manages to allude the Hound and the helicopters. He finally leaves the river and comes ashore by a forest. He follows railroad tracks and locates a group of exiled intellectuals. They are listening to a news report on television. The government, not wanting to admit defeat, announces that Montag has been captured and killed.

Montag is astounded at the intelligence of the exiles and believes he is way out of his league. The intellectuals, however, greet him warmly and treat him as an equal; they also give him a potion to change his chemical composition so that the Hound can never locate his scent. The old Montag is now gone forever, both physically and emotionally.

Montag is surprised to learn that the exiles have already begun their own revolution. Each of them is committing a book to memory before burning it. Montag is assigned *Ecclesiastes*, a book from the Old Testament of the Bible. The plan is for everyone to write the memorized book down again after the impending war is over. They feel confident that books will be published again in the future. Montag is relieved to have a safe haven and know that he and Faber are not alone in their fight.

War is declared and the city is destroyed

Summary

The war has begun. A shriek is heard as jets fly across the sky. Montag thinks about Millie and pictures her television screens going blank, leaving her to stare at a reflection of herself. He imagines that now she may understand his purpose. A bomb is dropped on the city, causing deafening sounds; suddenly Montag remembers where he and Millie first met.

After the dust settles, there is a ghostly silence. The exiled intellectuals know that the city will be gone, completely destroyed. The next morning, after breakfast, they all head into the city to see what remains. From a distance, Granger looks at the burning ruins and comments on the phoenix, the mythological bird that is destroyed by fire and re-born from the flames. Granger says man is like a phoenix, building himself up only to destroy himself and rebuild again. He reminds the men of their duty to pass on the words of knowledge to the future. As Montag looks around him, he realizes that he is leading the way of the intellectuals into the city. He thinks of a verse from *Ecclesiastes*: “To everything there is a season. A time to break down, a time to build up.” Montag wants to share the verse with the others, but decides to wait until they arrive in the city.

Notes

The last section of the book is a maelstrom of fire and smoke, bombs and destruction. As Granger talks about influence and effect and the changes a man can make in the world, the boom of the bombs ironically echo in the background. After the bomb is dropped on the city, it is aflame. In the silence that follows, Bradbury returns to his favorite symbols of fire and purification; although flames can destroy, they can also purge and purify. The hope at the end of the novel is that the evil world of censorship will be replaced by free one filled with books and intellectuals. To emphasize his theme, Bradbury introduces the symbol of the phoenix, the mythological bird that is reborn from the flames that have at first destroyed it. He then compares mankind to the phoenix and accuses humans of the process of building themselves up for destruction, followed by regeneration.

The hope of the world rests with these exiled intellectuals, who must begin anew the process of creating a society. Determination and intelligence propel them toward the city that nearly destroyed them. From the ashes, they will rebuild a world in their own image, where knowledge is praised and books are welcomed. It is the first note of real hope in Bradbury's tragic and pessimistic novel.

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Guy Montag - Montag is the protagonist and central character of the novel. Throughout the plot, he steadily grows and changes; by the end of the book, he is a completely different person.

At the start of the novel, Montag is a total conformist who has bought into the totalitarian system in which he lives without thought or question. He is married to Mildred, an insipid woman who spends her days in front of three television sets and lulls herself into sleep at night with music and sleeping pills.

Montag works for the government as a fireman, burning the homes of "criminals" who dare to possess books and setting loose the Mechanical Hound to track down those victims who dare to seek knowledge. Montag actually enjoys his cruel and destructive work and amuses himself by watching the suffering he inflicts. He and his fellow firemen even play masochistic games in which they set small animals loose and send the Mechanical Hound after them, betting on the outcome. Despite the seeming pleasure he receives from his job, Montag is hungry for knowledge. Instead of burning all the books in the houses of the criminals, he has actually stolen some of them and hidden them in his own home. He knows that it is an offense that is punishable by death.

When Montag meets Clarisse, his seventeen-year-old neighbor, he is amazed at her independent thinking and open defiance of convention. She is fresh and exciting, uninterested in the technological trappings of the ultra-modern society. She also challenges Montag when she asks him if he is happy. When faced with this question, Montag acknowledges that his life has no meaning; the more he thinks, the more he is dissatisfied with the vacuum of his life. By the end of Part I, Montag is poised for change, ready for a new, more meaningful existence.

Montag reveals his independent thoughts to his wife, but she is incapable of understanding them. When he shows her one of his books, she is horrified at his bravery. Unable to discuss his ideas at home, Montag, in total frustration, turns to Faber, an old English professor, for friendship and advice. The two of them devise a plan to reintroduce books into society; they will plant their books in the homes of firemen and in the firehouses themselves. When all firemen are destroyed, there will no longer be anyone to burn the books. To keep each other posted on the progress they are making and to boost each other's spirit, the two men communicate constantly by way of a small two-way radio, invented by Faber and planted in Montag's ear.

The people around Montag grow increasingly alarmed at his behavior. Beatty grows suspicious that Montag may be stealing and hiding books instead of burning them; he sets the Mechanical Hound of Montag's trail in order to frighten him into confession. Mildred is extremely concerned about the risk that her husband has placed

both of them in. When he dares to show one of the books to her neighbor friends, she is too frightened to continue. In the end, she reports him to the authority. As a result, he, as a fireman, must burn his own home. Amazingly, he takes pleasure in seeing it burn.

Through the implanted radio, Faber warns Montag to run, but his feet seem unable to move. When he looks at Beatty, he knows he must destroy the man if he and his plan are to survive. He fires his igniter at his boss and watches him burn. He then tries to escape from the Mechanical Hound. When he is captured, he fights the Hound bravely and manages to escape after the iron creature has injected poison into his leg. As Montag hobbles away to find Faber, he stops at the home of Mrs. Black, who also reported him to the authorities. He plants some of the stolen books into her kitchen and then rings the alarm. The deed pleases him greatly, for he has gotten his revenge on his accuser and also destroyed his next fireman, for her husband, Mr. Black, works at the firehouse.

Finally arriving at Faber's house, Montag is told about a group of exiled intellectuals who will give him refuge. Through careful planning and determination, he manages to stay ahead of the new and improved Mechanical Hound, who is trying to hunt him down and destroy him. By jumping into the river and floating downstream, Montag cannot be detected by either the Hound or the helicopters. He finally comes ashore by a forest and finds the exiles within. They welcome Montag into their midst and share their plans of saving books and knowledge with him. Montag is given the Biblical book of *Ecclesiastes* to memorize.

At the end of the novel, war has begun and a bomb has destroyed Montag's city. From a distance, the intellectuals watch the flames of destruction and determine they will go back and rebuild a new society, where books and new ideas are not only permitted, but eagerly welcomed. As the novel closes, they are seen walking toward the bombed out ruins to begin their task; the hope of their recreating the city is the one bright spot in the entire novel.

Bradbury uses the symbol of fire to describe much of what is happening to Montag. Like the phoenix that appears often in the novel, Montag's life is finally purified and reborn by the very fire he has been spewing for years. During the course of the plot, Montag evolves from an apathetic, conformist fireman, the very essence of socially acceptable stagnancy, to a new man filled with strong ideals and beliefs. He has a new purpose in life, to preserve books and the knowledge they contain. At the end of the novel, he hopes for the future and no longer dreads the present.

Mildred Montag - Mildred, normally called Millie in the book, is Montag's wife and the epitome of conformity. She is a product of the totalitarian system, having allowed her self to be fully shaped by the norms of society. She spends her days in front of three television screens, never having a thought of her own. She falls into a deep sleep each night with the help of sleeping pills and music piped into her ears. Her insipid lifestyle is further reflected in her emaciated body and chemically dyed hair.

Mildred is totally indifferent to her husband, treating him as if he were almost invisible. Although she has time to talk to her female neighbors about their television dream world, she never finds time to converse with Montag. She cannot even remember the time or circumstances of how she met her husband. She is also indifferent about life in general, as proven by the fact that she tries to kill herself, overdosing on sleeping pills. Her life is saved by the suicide orderlies, who are called to her rescue by Montag.

When Montag tells Millie about his stolen books and show them to her, she is horrified at his treachery to the system. He only gains her silence by reminding her that the government will see her as an accomplice. When he tries to talk to her about the content in the books or read some passage to her, she refuses to take part in it. In the end, she finally turns Montag in to the authorities. When they come to burn down the house and send the Mechanical Hound on her husband, she flees the house, never to be seen again in the novel. When Montag has

to watch his home burning, he takes great pleasure in seeing the flames destroy Millie's television parlor, for he feels this room has allowed Millie to live in her meaninglessness, devoid of any thoughts.

As Montag listens to the bombs destroying the city, he thinks of Millie. He imagines her sitting alone staring at a blank television screen that no longer works; all she can see is the sad reflection of her own face before she herself is destroyed. The final irony is that Millie is destroyed by the system she has so willingly supported. Montag wonders if she ever understood what he was trying to accomplish.

Captain Beatty - Captain Beatty is Montag's boss at the firehouse and his nemesis. Like Montag, Beatty has a curious mind. In the past, it is obvious that he has read a variety of books, for he often quotes from them. But unlike Montag, Beatty is a staunch supporter of the system, never questioning its rules. He reiterates his firm belief that books are evil over and over again. He is also determined that every last book will be destroyed by his firemen.

Beatty is continually a threat to Montag. From almost the beginning of the novel, he seems to suspect there is something different about this fireman; he even sets the Mechanical Hound on Montag, trying to extract a confession from him. When Montag says nothing, Beatty is enraged by his determination. When Montag finally turns one book into him, Beatty is not tricked. He is sure that Montag has many more. As a result, he plans the destruction of Montag. Taking the unsuspecting "criminal" along, Beatty leads the fireman to Montag's home and forces him to ignite his own dwelling. Then when he discovers the tiny radio in Montag's ear, he promises that he will find who is attached to the other end and destroy him as well. Fearful for his own life, for Faber's life, and for the future of their plan, Montag feels he has no choice but to murder Beatty. He turns the igniter on him and watches his boss burn to death. Montag is amazed that he never tried to run away and believes that Beatty was so unhappy with his life that he was ready to die.

Throughout the book, there is something strangely unsettling about Beatty. Although he constantly states that books are evil and directs their burning, he also has a fascination for them, as evidenced in the many allusions and quotes he gives from texts he has read. It is obvious that he is a tortured man himself. Although that fact does not excuse his despicable behavior, it makes him appear as a complicated victim himself, instead of only as a one-dimensional villain. His easy acceptance of his own death by burning at the end of the novel seems to prove that he is ready to end his torment.

Professor Faber - Faber was a professor of English before the new laws supplanted the need for literature teachers. Now living by himself, he passes his time recalling the books he has read in the past and tinkering with new inventions. When Montag is desperately in need of a friend and confidante, he thinks about Faber. He recalls that he once saw the old professor hiding something under his shirt, which obviously was a book. As a result, Montag thinks he may find for himself a helper and teacher in Faber.

When Montag first calls on Faber, the old professor is not interested in admitting him. Then he sees the Bible that Montag is carrying, and he cannot resist, for it has been years since he has read a copy of it. Montag begs Faber to help him understand books and give him advice. Once again, Faber is reluctant, saying it is too dangerous; but then he imagines how pleasant it would be to again discuss ideas with someone. In the end, he agrees to help Montag. They talk about how their society has degenerated from a literate one into one totally dependent on mechanical devices. Faber even implants a tiny two-way radio in Montag's ear so the two of them can constantly communicate. Faber plans to recite book passages to Montag while he sleeps, certain that this unconscious receipt of knowledge will be retained.

Faber and Montag begin to plan a revolution against the totalitarian system that will allow no reading materials or independent thoughts. They will plant books in the homes of all the firemen and all the firehouses. Then when all the firemen are destroyed for possessing books, there will no longer be anyone available to burn the

printed pages. At first, Faber is not interested in Montag's plan, saying it is ridiculous and dangerous. Then, however, he realizes that it is at least a plan of action and he agrees to help. Faber feels he has been a coward, afraid to fight the system, for too long.

Throughout the rest of the book, Faber is a faithful friend to Montag. Whenever he needs advice or is in trouble, Montag finds that Faber is on the other end of the radio to answer his questions or give him warnings. It is Faber that tells him he must run away after he kills Beatty. And it is Faber who saves Montag's life by guiding him to the exiled intellectuals that give him protection and hope. The old professor is truly a solid support for Montag and an invaluable teacher in Montag's quest for truth.

Clarisse McClellan - Clarisse is a total non-conformist and the seventeen-year-old neighbor of Montag. She is refreshingly different, not afraid to be herself. She believes in old-fashioned values, dreams, and aspirations and talks about the beauty in the smell of a flower or in the soft feel of grass. She is also unafraid to express her ideas and challenges Montag by asking him why he is a fireman, burning books. She also wants to know if he is really a happy man. As a result of her probing questions, Montag begins to examine the ethics of his job and the meaning of his life; he realizes that he truly needs a change. As a result, Clarisse is the catalyst that compels Montag forward in his journey of self-realization.

For Montag, Clarisse is everything that Millie is not, for she thinks, she feels, and she enjoys life. It is not surprising that Montag really likes her and enjoys spending time talking to her. He always looks forward to their next visit. As a result, her sudden disappearance from the world disturbs him greatly; and when he finally learns from his wife that Clarisse has been hit by a car and killed, he is greatly grieved. Montag realizes late in the novel that the hit-and-run accident was probably engineered by Beatty.

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

Fahrenheit 451 is divided into three parts, each with its own title. Part I is titled "The Hearth and the Salamander." The overriding symbol in this section is of the salamander that lives through fire. In this section, the setting, the conflict, and most of the key characters are introduced. At the end of the section, Clarisse asks Montag the all-important question, "Are you happy?" Montag will spend the rest of the novel dealing with his unhappiness and trying to fix it. The conflict is, therefore, clearly delineated in this first section.

Part II is devoted to the rising action of the plot and is appropriately entitled "The Sieve and the Sand." The symbol in this section comes in a flashback to Montag's childhood, when he was challenged to try and fill a sieve with sand. He was too young to understand the total futility of his efforts, but continued to try until frustration got the best of him. Throughout this section, Montag again feels like he is trying to fill a sieve with sand. He realizes the futility of the society in which he lives and the vapid nature of his existence and he becomes very frustrated that he can do nothing about it. The sieve and the sand also refer to society, which, like a sieve, is unable to retain or truly appreciate knowledge; as fast as they put knowledge into the sieve, they allow it to uselessly flow out.

Part III contains the climax and conclusion of the plot and is appropriately entitled "Burning Bright," from the title of a William Blake poem. In the poem, the tiger burns bright as it symbolizes rampant evil in the world. In *Fahrenheit 451*, the world is clearly evil, and throughout the book, it seems to be burning bright. In fact, fire and burning are the most used images and symbols in the book. The firemen no longer put out fires, but start them by burning books; Clarisse puts a burning question into Montag's thoughts, causing him to question being a fireman; Montag is called to burn his own house; to protect himself, Montag burns Beatty to death; when Montag escapes, he finds the exiles sitting by the fire; when the bombs are dropped on the city, it is literally on fire. But in the book the fire has a dual purpose – both good and bad. Although it is used by the totalitarian society as a destructive force, the intellectuals believe that the fire in the city has purged the society of its evil; they believe it can rise like a phoenix out of its own ashes. At the end of the book, the group of exiles walks

towards the burned out city to rebuild a new and free society, where books are treasured and ideas are shared.

The plot ends in tragedy with one small, comic hope at the end. The protagonist, Montag, fights the repressive society throughout the book. In the process, he loses Clarisse (who is killed in a car wreck), Mildred (his wife who turns him in and then deserts him), his home (which is burned on the instruction of Beatty), his safety (which is threatened by the Mechanical Hound after he murders Beatty), his leg (which is seriously injured by the Hound), and his city (which is destroyed by bombs). In spite of all these tragedies, Montag is determined to survive and help to build a new and free society. At the end of the plot, he and the exiled intellectuals walk toward the city, still aflame from the bombing. This ending image is the one small ray of hope in the entire book; perhaps the fire has purged the evil, and Montag will be able to build a better society built on freedom.

THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

Throughout the book, the key themes of conformity, apathy, stagnancy and censorship are shown in a variety of ways. Beatty and Mildred, both symbols of the totalitarian system, live vapid, meaningless lives and cannot escape. At first, Montag is also caught in the system, but his mind still longs for knowledge. He is completely intrigued by Clarisse, a symbol of non-conformity and free thought and a total contrast to Mildred; she challenges him to look at his own life and give it more meaning. As a result, he rejects the life of conformity, apathy, stagnancy, and censorship demanded by society. In its place, he begins to think independently, seek knowledge, steal, hide, and read books, hate his job, confront his wife's indifference, and eventually kill Beatty. In truth, the entire text of *Fahrenheit 451* is a discourse in theme.

The one positive message of the novel is that society can and will rejuvenate itself, no matter what state it has fallen into. Montag represents the common man who finds it in himself to seek the truth no matter what obstacles are in his way. Man is a cousin to the phoenix, as Granger says, and will rise again from the ashes. Man creates the fire that will consume him, but he also manages to be born again out of the fire, ready to begin anew.

STUDY QUESTIONS / ESSAY TOPICS / BOOK REPORT IDEAS

1. Discuss the gradual development of Montag throughout the plot. Compare and contrast him to Beatty.
2. Make a list of the people in the novel who contribute to Montag's growing self-awareness and explain what they teach him.
3. Explain the relationship of the title of the book to its meaning.
4. Explain some of the futuristic (fantastic) technological advances seen in the novel. How do they compare with some technologies in the current world.
5. Describe Mildred and contrast her to Montag and Clarisse.
6. What does the old lady represent to Montag and how does she affect him?
7. Is Beatty hypocritical? Fully explain your answer.
8. What do you consider to be the most important theme of the novel? Why? How is it developed?
9. Explain the images of death, suicide, and murder in the novel. What are their relationships to the totalitarian society?
10. Fully explain the image of fire/burning and how it is repeatedly used in the novel.
11. Fully describe the Mechanical Hound and how it is used? Do you feel it is effective? Why?
12. How does Bradbury build suspense in the novel?
13. Why is the novel a tragedy? What one small ray of hope is there at the end?
14. Explain the meaning of each of the three titles given to the parts of the book.
15. Explain the importance of the phoenix symbol to the novel.
16. What do the numbers 451 represent in the novel?
17. How did the government gain control over the people of this society?

COMMENT ON THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

The study of literature is not like the study of math or science, or even history. While those disciplines are based largely upon fact, the study of literature is based upon interpretation and analysis. There are no clear-cut answers in literature, outside of the factual information about an author's life and the basic information about setting and characterization in a piece of literature. The rest is a highly subjective reading of what an author has written; each person brings a different set of values and a different background to the reading. As a result, no two people see the piece of literature in exactly the same light, and few critics agree on everything about a book or an author.

In this study guide, we have tried to give an objective literary analysis based upon the information actually found in the novel, book, or play. In the end, however, it is an individual interpretation, but one that we feel can be readily supported by the information that is presented in the guide. In your course of literature study, you or your professor/teacher may come up with a different interpretation of the mood or the theme or the conflict. Your interpretation, if it can be logically supported with information contained within the piece of literature, is just as correct as ours; so is the interpretation of your teacher or professor.

Literature is simply not a black or white situation; instead, there are many gray areas that are open to varying analyses. Your task is to come up with your own analysis that you can logically defend. Hopefully, these booknotes will help you to accomplish that goal.

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